

YOU GAVE HIM LIFE.  
GIVE HIM A CHANCE.



SUPPORT YOUR CHILD  
IN EVERY WAY.



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# FATHERHOOD

## Taking Responsibility for Your Child

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS FOR FATHERS

Parenting is one of the greatest responsibilities a person can undertake. Fathers and mothers bring different qualities to a child's life and each are equally important. All children need two parents, whether they live together or not, and all children need emotional and financial support from both parents.

As a father, you may be pulled in many different directions, and the challenge is to effectively balance those demands. However challenging life may be, being a dad is one of life's greatest pleasures. Having a child is a big responsibility.

Children who have a dad in their life:

- Do better in school;
- Are less likely to join gangs;
- Have higher self esteem;
- Have fewer behavioral problems; and
- Are less likely to be involved with substance abuse.

### What is "establishing paternity"?

Paternity means fatherhood. Establishing paternity provides the child with a legal father.

### Why is it important to establish the legal father of a child?

Fathers and mothers both have the right to know and the responsibility to support their child emotionally and financially even when they are not married to each other. Establishing paternity gives the child the same legal rights as a child born to married parents.

Children with legal fathers are entitled to benefits through their fathers. These benefits include:

- **Identity:** It is important to know who we are. Your child has the right to the sense of belonging that comes from knowing both parents. Also, the father's name can appear on the birth certificate.
- **Money:** The law requires both parents to support their children. This is true even with an unplanned pregnancy. Children supported by one parent often do not have enough money for their needs.
- **Benefits:** Your child has the right to other benefits from both parents. These may include Social Security, insurance benefits (including medical), inheritance rights, veterans' benefits, as well as other types of benefits.
- **Medical:** Your child may need a complete medical history from the families of both parents. The medical history may include information about inherited health problems.

### How is paternity legally established?

If the mother is married when she became pregnant or when the child is born, her husband is considered by law to be the father unless a court has determined that the husband is not the father.

If the mother is not married when she became pregnant or when the child is born, paternity can be established voluntarily or a judge can declare a man the legal father of the child.



How can unwed parents voluntarily acknowledge paternity?

Both parents must sign an Affidavit of Parentage form. The signatures must be notarized. The father needs to provide a picture identification and his Social Security number, if possible, before signing the affidavit of parentage in the presence of a notary public.



What is the difference between a legal father and a biological father?

The legal father may **not** be the biological father. Every child has a biological father. The biological father is the man whose sperm joined the mother’s egg to create the baby. The legal father is the man the law recognizes as the father of the child. The legal father is responsible for providing emotional and financial support for the child.



When a married couple has a child, the law automatically recognizes the husband as the child’s legal father; therefore, paternity does not need to be determined. When an unmarried woman has a child, an official act (establishing legal paternity) is needed to establish the legal father of the child.

Her parents do not want me around, or she says it is not my baby. What should I do?

If you believe you are the child’s father, it is your right and responsibility to establish paternity, even if the mother or her parents don’t want you to establish paternity. The Department of Human Services (DHS) child support specialist can help you with the process of establishing paternity. Call 1-866-540-0008 or 1-866-661-0005.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VOLUNTARILY ACKNOWLEDGING PATERNITY?

You are accepting the rights and responsibilities that come with raising a child when you voluntarily acknowledge paternity. Those rights and responsibilities include:

- The mother has custody of the child unless otherwise determined by the court or agreed by the parties in writing;
- Either parent may assert a claim in court for parenting time or custody;
- Both parents have a right to notice and a hearing regarding the adoption of the child;
- Both parents have the responsibility to support the child and comply with an order for child support;
- The parents are giving up their right to blood or genetic testing, a court appointed attorney, and a trial to determine if the man is the biological father of the child.

Can I visit my baby?

Parenting time, (formerly known as visitation), is the first step to a healthy relationship between your child and you. If you and the mother cannot mutually agree on parenting time, the court can order parenting time. The order may include a parenting time schedule.

How can I be sure it’s my baby?

If you think it’s not your baby, and the mother says it is, it will be up to a court to decide. A hearing will be held where the mother and you can tell your sides of the story. The court may also order genetic tests to help establish paternity.

How can I obtain a genetic (paternity) test?

Michigan’s child support program provides the opportunity to request a genetic test to:

- The mother;
- The alleged father; or
- DHS, if the child receives public assistance.

The State of Michigan contracts with a laboratory to provide genetic (paternity) testing at a minimal cost. The mother, the alleged father, and the child must have an open child support case, in which a court has not yet determined paternity, to qualify for the reduced cost for genetic testing. The laboratory will perform a series of genetic tests to indicate the likelihood that a man is, or is not the biological father of a child. Currently, the most common method for a genetic test is DNA. Parents who do not wish to start a child support case may also pay a private clinic or laboratory to obtain a genetic (paternity) test.

Note: Parents with a Michigan child support case, who choose a private clinic or laboratory to obtain a genetic (paternity) test, must provide a copy of the test results to the county prosecuting attorney or friend of the court handling their child support case.

What is DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid)?

DNA contains the hereditary information required for the development of every living thing on earth. Children inherit one half of their DNA from their mother and one half from their father. The portion of DNA that a child does not inherit from the mother is called the obligate paternal portion. If the obligate paternal portion of the child’s DNA does **not** match the alleged father, the man is excluded as the biological father.

The laboratory technician will rub a cotton tipped swab on the inside cheek of the mouth to obtain a DNA sample from the mother, the alleged father, and the child. The laboratory can also obtain DNA from a blood or tissue sample. The laboratory will then test and compare the details of the child’s DNA sample with details in the mother’s and alleged father’s DNA samples to indicate the likelihood that a man is, or is not the biological father of a child.

Who pays for the genetic (paternity) testing?

A court decides who pays for the genetic testing. A court usually orders the alleged father to pay the costs if he is found to be the father.

Will I have to pay child support?

If you are found to be the father you will be expected to financially contribute to the support of your child as stated in the court order. Child support is set by a formula found in the Michigan Child Support Formula Manual. This formula considers both parents’ income, the number of children and the custodial arrangement. Medical costs for the baby may be included in the child support order.

Will I have to pay child support if I live in another state?

Yes, under federal law states help one another to:

- Establish paternity;
- Obtain child support orders; and
- Assure that the non-custodial parent (NCP) pays the court ordered child support.

Where can I go for help?

For more information on establishing paternity, call toll free, 1-866-540-0008 or 1-866-661-0005 and speak with a DHS child support specialist.

